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ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

Implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/199, entitled "Triennial policy review of operational activities for development within the United Nations system"

Note by the Secretariat

1. On 22 December 1989, the General Assembly adopted resolution 44/211, entitled "Comprehensive triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system". With the objective of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of operational activities, the resolution called for substantial reforms of various aspects of United Nations development activities, inter alia, structural changes of the United Nations system at the country level and a shift from a project approach to a programme approach. The General Assembly requested the Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation to submit, for three years, annual reports on the implementation of that resolution, on a consolidated system-wide basis, to the Economic and Social Council, and to include, starting in 1991, in his annual reports submitted through the Council to the Assembly, information on the measures taken by the governing bodies, of the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system. Also in that resolution, the Assembly requested the Director-General to submit to it at its forty-seventh session, in the context of the triennial policy review, a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of that resolution.

2. In its resolution 46/219 of 20 December 1991, entitled "Operational activities of the United Nations system", the Assembly noted with concern that progress in implementing parts of its resolution 44/211 had been disappointing and reaffirmed the importance of the resolution and the need for coordinated and full implementation of that resolution by the relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system. In addition, the Assembly stressed that the modality of national execution should be the norm for programmes and projects funded by the United Nations system, which it called upon to simplify the rules and procedures for national execution within the framework of enhanced accountability. Also in that

resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed the importance of the triennial policy review of operational activities to be undertaken by the Assembly at its forty-seventh session, which should build on and, where necessary, elaborate further the elements of its resolution 44/211.

3. The Assembly, in its resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992, entitled "Triennial policy review of operational activities for development within the United Nations system", again noted with concern that many of the principles of its resolution 44/211 still had to be implemented. Assembly resolution 47/199 is built on elements of its resolutions 44/211 and 46/219 but also includes provisions aimed at enhancing the impact of operational activities for development within the United Nations system at the country level.

4. In paragraph 9 of its resolution 47/199, the Assembly stressed that, in order to ensure the effective integration of assistance provided by the United Nations system into the development process of countries and to facilitate the assessment and evaluation of the impact and sustainability of that assistance, a country strategy note should be formulated by interested recipient Governments, under the leadership of the resident coordinator. Also in paragraph 9, the Assembly stated that the country strategy note should outline the contribution the operational activities for development within the United Nations system could make to respond to the requirements identified by recipient countries in their plans, strategies and priorities and should be transmitted to the governing body of each funding organization as a reference for the consideration of its specific country programme.

5. In paragraph 10 of that resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed that, within the context of the Joint Consultative Group on Policies, the funding organizations of the United Nations system, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Food Programme and the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the funds administered by UNDP should harmonize their cycles and, where appropriate, adapt them to national budget cycles, plans and strategies. In paragraph 33 of the same resolution, the Assembly requested inter-agency mechanisms, in particular the Joint Consultative Group on Policies, to give priority to simplifying, harmonizing and increasing the transparency of their procedures relating to programme component and project formulation, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In paragraph 35 of that resolution, the Assembly stressed the need for funds and programmes to take into account its decisions on auditing standards.

6. Reiterating two principles from its resolutions 44/211 and 46/219 (that there should be a shift from a project approach to a programme approach and that national execution should be the norm for programmes and projects funded by the United Nations system), the Assembly, in paragraphs 13 and 22 of its resolution 47/199, requested the Secretary-General to promote an early agreement on a common interpretation of both the programme approach and national execution to be applied by the United Nations system.

7. In paragraph 24 of its resolution 47/199, the Assembly decided that, in order to increase coherence in programming and resource utilization, capacity and authority should be further decentralized to the field offices. In that context, the Assembly, in paragraph 25 of that resolution, strongly urged that governing bodies of all funds, programmes and specialized agencies should ensure that the prescribed limits on field level authority for cancelling,

modifying and adding activities within approved programmes should be expanded to become equal and uniform to the maximum extent possible. In paragraph 27 of that resolution, it stressed that the procurement of expertise and equipment should be decentralized to the country level, with due regard to the principles of international competitive bidding.

8. In paragraph 38 of its resolution 47/199, the Assembly emphasized that an effectively functioning resident coordinator system would be dependent on a number of factors, including the following:

(a) The United Nations system at the country level should be tailored to the specific developmental needs of the country in such a way that they corresponded to ongoing and projected cooperation programmes rather than to the institutional structure of the United Nations;

(b) In strengthening the resident coordinator system, the creation of an additional bureaucratic layer should be avoided.

In paragraph 41, the Assembly called upon resident coordinators to take the necessary steps to establish field-level committees, which would normally comprise all resident United Nations system representatives to undertake advisory functions such as giving guidance on proposed programmes of funding organizations.

9. In paragraphs 43-46 of its resolution 47/199, the Assembly set out principles that should guide the development and implementation of training programmes. In paragraph 45, the Assembly stressed that common, system-wide training programmes should aim to develop capacities, especially in areas such as the programme approach, national execution, programme accountability and financial audit, support costs and evaluation and monitoring. In paragraph 44, the Assembly emphasized that those training programmes should include on-the-job training and be provided on a continuous basis as an integral function of the United Nations system field office structure. In paragraph 46 of the resolution, the Assembly urged the United Nations system to give appropriate attention to the establishment and maintenance of national institutional expertise through increased participation in training programmes of national staff.

10. In paragraph 51 of its resolution 47/199, the Assembly called upon the governing bodies of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system to take appropriate action for the full implementation of that resolution and requested the executive heads of those entities to submit a yearly progress report to their governing bodies on measures taken for its implementation. In paragraph 54 of that resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Council at its substantive sessions of 1993 and 1994 a progress report on the implementation of that resolution.

11. A progress report on the implementation of Assembly resolution 47/199 (E/1993/73) was submitted to the Council at its substantive session of 1993. It provided information on the progress made in essential areas of the resolution such as programme approach, national execution, decentralization and training. Inter-agency mechanisms have been active - the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination devoted a large part of its first session of 1993 to achieving agreement on common interpretations of the programme approach and national

execution, as well as on the best manner of proceeding with the country strategy note. Furthermore, the Joint Consultative Group on Policies assigned specific tasks related to the implementation of Assembly resolution 47/199 to its subgroups and held high-level meetings in January and April 1993 dealing with various aspects of that resolution, including the country strategy note and the resident coordinator system.

12. With respect to action taken by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) to facilitate the implementation of Assembly resolution 47/199, several programming tools and management arrangements have been put in place. UNDCP has adopted a project format largely in line with that of UNDP and has introduced project summaries for all operational (and most pipeline) projects to increase the transparency of activities. For the biennium 1994-1995, UNDCP has also prepared country programme frameworks and subregional programme frameworks containing information on current and planned technical cooperation, with reference to the national or subregional drug abuse situation, and the priority needs of certain countries or subregions. It is expected that the management information tools will serve as important contributions to the preparation of the country strategy notes. Furthermore, UNDCP is developing a manual for national project managers and chief technical advisers to guide project implementation with a view to achieving more effective and efficient use of resources. Revised UNDP/UNDCP working arrangements will, inter alia, facilitate functions of the UNDP Resident Coordinator and allow for better integration of drug control components in United Nations system-wide activities.

13. Assembly resolution 47/199 is brought to the attention of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in view of its function as the principle United Nations policy-making body on drug control issues and in view of its mandate to provide policy guidance to UNDCP.